

Gordon Craig

Soldier of Fortune — by Randall Parrish



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"Yes."
"Will you have her brought here?"
He walked across the cabin twice, turning the proposition over in his mind. Apparently concluding that the ordeal might as well be over with first as last, he opened the door and gave an order to Peters. Then he returned to his seat at the desk.
We both arose to our feet as she entered, glancing about her curiously at the rather strange surroundings, then stopping irresolutely, apparently recognizing neither of us. Suddenly the light of recognition leaped into her eyes and she took a quick step forward.
"Mr. Craig—you here? Why, I can hardly understand. Were you made prisoner again?"
"I suppose that to be my status, although I hardly know," I answered, yet unable to refrain from accepting the extended hand. "I presume you know this person?"
She swept my face with a swift, questioning glance and then looked beyond me at the man standing beside the desk.
"No, I do not," she said. "I have no remembrance of ever seeing him before."
"Is that not rather strange?" I asked, stealing myself to the task, "after



"You'll learn yet what the Sea Gull is," asserting that he was your husband? He is the owner of this vessel—Philip Henley."
"You are not Philip Henley," she said firmly. "He is my husband."
The smile widened, revealing the cruel, white teeth.
"I expected heroics. It was hardly to be supposed that you would confess your friend at once and before your lover."
She shrunk back, her hands still extended.
"My—my lover?"
"Now stop!" I broke in, every nerve tingling as I stepped between them. "Another insinuation like that and you will learn what I can do. You may be captain of this boat, but you are alone with us now, and I can kill you before you could utter a cry. I will if you dare insult her again."
He reeled back against the desk, although I do not think I touched him, and his hand sought an open drawer. I knew him instantly for a coward and gripped his wrist, burling him from me half across the room. He gasped a bit, rubbing his bruised wrist, his eyes shifting to the closed door as though contemplating an alarm.
"There is no use going off at half cock, Craig," he snarled. "I didn't mean any insult. And I'll get you for that some time. You'll learn yet what the Sea Gull is."
"No doubt," I coincided, tired of his threats and awakened to the fact that this quarrel was not likely to help our chances. "But for a few minutes it will be worth your while to listen to me. I am not defending this woman from anything but unnecessary insults. If she has deceived me I want to find it out. If you are Philip Henley, as you claim to be, you must have evidence to prove it. Convince me that her assertions are false and you will not find me unreasonable."
"Gordon Craig, do you mean?"
I turned to her, stealing myself to look into her appealing eyes.
"I have been honest with you from the beginning," I interrupted abruptly. "Now, if I discover that your statements are false, the inducements are all the other way. I am a soldier of fortune."

to understand each other. Of course I have the proofs. I would be a fool to sit in such a game without a winning hand. Sit down, both of you, while we talk this over. There is no reason why the three of us should not be friends, provided you are sensible."
"But—but I am his wife," she panted to me indignantly. "Philip Henley's wife. I—I showed you our certificate."
"A fake, a forgery," asserted the other roughly, before I could find voice. "You had it framed up all right, if you had never run across me. Show me the paper."
"I cannot, for it is not here. I placed it in my valise back at that house." She stepped forward with hands held out toward me. "But you know Gordon Craig, you know. I could not have forged that. I had not time; no information which would have led to such an act. You tell him so."
"I hardly think he will, madam," returned the captain shortly, evidently feeling it better not to let me speak. "And there is no use going on with this any farther. Answer me a question or two, that is all. When did you first tell Craig you were Philip Henley's wife?"
I clinched my hands at the bewildered embarrassment in her eyes.
"It was after we came here, when I was frightened, and felt that I must confess the truth. I—I had begun to trust him."
"Oh, indeed, and you failed to tell him at first because you did not trust him."
"Partially that—yes. Although I do not think the name Henley was even mentioned during our first interview. I am sure I did not realize it was my husband's father who was dead until later."
"Exactly; you picked up a strange man on the street, agreed to go off on a criminal mission with him, and now expect us to believe you perfectly innocent of any wrong intent."
"That will be enough," I interrupted, unable to remain quiet any longer. "The motives of the woman and how we planned to meet are no concern of yours. If you are Philip Henley, prove it and let it go at that. I have told you plainly enough where I stand."
"Just as you say, Craig," affecting an easy good nature. "That is perfectly agreeable to me. However, as it makes no difference what the late Mrs. Henley thinks, we will dismiss her from the case and settle the affair quietly between ourselves. I have got a proposition which will interest you." He touched a button, and I heard the sharp tinkle of a bell outside. Almost instantly the door in the cabin opened.
"That you, Peters? Conduct the woman back to her stateroom, lock the door and bring me the key."
He bent forward, searching for something in a pigeonhole to his right, and I caught her eyes, touching my lips with my fingers to signal silence, while an inclination of the head told her to go without resistance.
The swift change of expression on her face proved her instant comprehension, as, without uttering a word of protest, she turned and disappeared. Peters returned with the key. Henley dropped it into his pocket.
"That will be all," he said. "You can go."
As the door closed again behind Peters, the fellow rose to his feet and held out his hand. "You are the kind I like, Craig," he said cordially. "At first I had my doubts about you and, no doubt, have been harsh. Did you see her face when you first sided in with me? She wilted completely. Well, that will make the rest easy. Sit down again, and I will explain what I want you for. The legal papers which absolutely establish my identity as Philip Henley are in the hands of lawyers who represent me at Carrollton. The case will not come up for adjudication for several weeks yet, speaking slowly and with careful choice of words, "but my contention as to the property is thoroughly established. It had to be, for, as you know, the judge's son had been away from this neighborhood for years, practically ever since boyhood. He was almost unknown to the local inhabitants, even to the servants. This was even reported as being dead. This state of affairs made identification the most important thing to be considered. Consequently all documents bearing directly on that point are at present out of my reach. You understand?"
"Yes; only you must have retained something to substantiate your word."
"Precisely. I was coming to that. I have letters from my father which should be sufficient. You have seen Judge Henley's writing?" and he handed me a half dozen missives. They were without envelopes, each beginning simply, "My Dear Son," relating principally to local conditions on the plantation, and occasionally expressing a desire for the wanderer to return and assume the burden of management. That they were in the crumbled and peculiar handwriting of the old judge was beyond all question, and the dates covered several years. I read them through carefully, puzzled by their contents.
"There are no envelopes?"
"No; I never kept them—why?"
"Only that no name is mentioned; they begin all alike, 'My Dear Son.'"
"I never thought of that," he admitted, simulating surprise, "but can

supplement by showing you this picture, taken three years ago at Mobile. Of course you will recognize myself, but may never have seen a photograph of Judge Henley."
"I never have."
"Well, that is his likeness, and there are those on board who will identify it. Does this satisfy you that I am what I claim to be?"
In truth it did not, for I would have believed nothing in opposition to the positive statement of the woman that he was not Philip Henley. Yet under other conditions—divorced from what I knew—the letters would be conclusive. Were they really addressed to him or had he stolen them? If the latter, then how had he succeeded in getting his picture on the same plate with Judge Henley's? Aware that even the slightest hesitancy might awaken suspicion, I answered quickly: "It would seem to be unanswerable. What hurts my pride is to have been made such a fool of."
"That's nothing, Craig. We have all had that experience. I stand ready to give you a chance now on the winning side. There will be more money in it for us both. What do you say?"
"I should prefer to know more about your proposition."
"It has nothing whatever to do with the Henley matter. That is practically settled already, so you will not be further involved with the girl."
"You would oblige me by leaving her name out of the discussion then," I interposed coldly.
"I changed, well satisfied with his diplomacy.
"We cannot obliterate her entirely. Pretty enough to be useful, too, I imagine, if she can ever be brought to view this affair from the right angle."
I gazed directly into his eyes, barely able to keep from throttling him.
"Drop it," I said sternly. "The girl is to be left alone if I have any part in your scheme. Now I want to know what is expected of me. May I ask questions?"
"Certainly. Fire away."
"Where are we bound?"
"Spanish Honduras," lazily, but spreading out a map and tapping it with his finger. "Puerto Cortez, if we can make that port safely; if not, then somewhere along the coast between there and Trupillo. There will be signals."
I leaned forward, startled out of my self-restraint.
"Honduras! Good Lord! What are you—a filibuster?"
"Hardly," with a short laugh. "That is too dangerous a job and not money enough in it. I prefer to do my revolting through others and, cap the swine. That's the safe end of the game. It happens to be Honduras just now; I have been equally interested in other down-trodden countries. In truth, friend, I am a patriot for revenue only."
"You mean you furnish arms?"
"For a suitable consideration. In strict confidence I will send a securely packed away in the Sea Gull, large and rapid machinery, are 200 rapid fire guns and a sufficient amount for a small force. The profits total \$150,000 gold."
"You mean to let the lady on board?"
"Unless she pre-jump overboard."
"And what have you said?"
"What you want."
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CHAP. II.
I Join the Gull.
"YOU chance to be the very savior of man I need. The devil could not have sent me a better," he said, with some enthusiasm. "You are an American soldier, the best drilled men in the world for irregular service. You can understand that the longer I can keep those fellows down there fighting, the more I will sell. Good! that is part of my business. And the better they are drilled the longer they will keep it up. That is what I want you for—to help make that mob of rags into an army. You can do it, and I am willing to pay the price."
"I perceive your point," I said at last, facing him. "But what is there in it for me?"
"A good round sum," he replied. "More than you ever made before, I warrant, not excepting the promises made you in this Henley will case. We'll talk the details over later."
"Who is responsible for my pay?"
"See here, Craig, the case stands like this. The revolutionists down there asked me to find them a competent drill master, and they will pay royally. They've got the money, too, seeds of it. There will be no trouble on that score. Besides, I need a reliable man ashore to look after shipments. We have to land our goods in a hurry, you understand, at night, without checking up. I can afford to hand you something pretty nice on the side to assure myself a square deal."
"It looks good," I confessed, but still hesitating. "Only I shall have to have it in writing and more in detail."
"We'll talk that over in the morning; it's late now. Take the third stateroom, starboard; it's all ready for you."
"Then I am no longer to consider myself a prisoner on board?"
"Certainly not. Practically, you are one of us."
"And I have the freedom of the deck?"
He smiled grimly, gazing intently at me.
"That is safe enough, I reckon, even if I questioned your interest in this adventure. There must be ten miles of water already between us and the coast. There are no bullets on your liberty, but I wouldn't advise your going forward at present, not until the men understand the situation. They're a hard lot."
"Revolutionists?"
"No; plain New Orleans wharf rats, the scouring of the seven seas."
"Who is first mate—the German?"
"Yes; Herman; a fine sailor. Was with the Hamour people until he had a wreck. The creole Brocas and is second, and two of them together could tame a cargo of wildcats."
I took his hand, feeling the sinewy grip of his lean, brown fingers, and turned to the door. The single lamp in the main cabin was turned low,

only faintly illuminating the interior. In the quiet I could feel the movement of the vessel and realized there was some sea on, although the engines were being operated only at half speed. This seemed odd if speed was desirable, as I supposed it must be on a voyage of this nature. I was not in the least sleepy and sank down in the first chair to think, my eyes on the captain's door.
What Henley meant to do with the girl was problematical—I had not thought to ask—but he either intended putting her ashore in Honduras or else holding her prisoner on board until the Sea Gull returned north. Either contingency was bad enough, and the suspicion flashed suddenly across me that the final decision would depend on how kindly she might receive the attentions of the captain. Nor did I question the result. I had not known the lady long, but in that brief time our relations had been sufficiently intimate to yield me a good insight into her womanly character. There would be no yielding, no compromise. I felt my teeth lock, my hands clench in sudden anger.
I may have remained there for a quarter of an hour, motionless, thinking over every incident. No one disturbed me. The captain was still in his stateroom, where once or twice I imagined I heard him pacing the floor. The steward had apparently retired for the night, though it was not late, as a glimpse of the watch proved. My eyes turned to the door on either side, then each plainly numbered, and I noted the one assigned to me and the one assigned to the other forward where I had been held prisoner.
I wondered which of these others might be hers and passed silently from door to door, vaguely hoping for some sign of guidance. They were all tightly closed, and I dare not try the locks, as I was certain one, at least, of the under officers would be sleeping below. My round had brought me to the second door on the port side when in the dim light I perceived something lying at my feet and stooped down to better determine its character. It was the end of a very narrow light blue ribbon, apparently caught beneath the door. The door was numbered "5." "The accident or design, she who came aboard, I knew the door was locked. I knew myself there was no space. If I was to communicate with the other means must be employed. What? This was the second stateroom on the port side. Judging from my own, the width of each room would be about six feet. There ought to be no difficulty in locating her porthole from the deck above nor in attracting her attention.
The one thing I desired now was to re-establish myself fully in her confidence, assure her I was at liberty on board, able and willing to be of service. This necessity overshadowed everything else. If I could discover means of communication we could plan hopefully, assured of co-operation. This seemed possible, the way to its accomplishment open. Shadowed from observation by the thick butt of the after mast, I wrote a few lines hastily on the back of an envelope, then slipped it into my pocket and ventured up the companion stairs.
A glance sufficed to convince that I was alone and unobserved. The deck was unobstructed aft, except for a small boat swing to davits astern and the cabin transoms. These last were elevated some three feet, but considerable space separated from the rail. I slipped into this opening on the port side, crouching in the dense shadow until again assured I was alone. My position afforded as good a view forward as the darkness would permit and likewise enabled me to see into the dimly lit cabin below. I was not watched or spied upon. For the first time I began to feel free.
(To be Continued.)
Followed Suit.
On the day of the admission of M. Rostand to the French academy the author of "Cyrano" and "L'Algon" gave a breakfast to a few of his friends, the guest of honor being Mme. Bernhardt. The actress was dressed in a handsome gown, which had been made expressly for the occasion. At the end of the breakfast she arose and in an impressive manner took a glass, held it high and said, "I drink to the greatest of French dramatists, M. Rostand, and I drink after the Greek manner!" She then poured the contents of her glass over her head and gown.
Two of Rostand's small sons were sitting at a side table wearing new velvet suits, also made for the occasion. In the silence which followed Bernhardt's dramatic tribute the elder of the boys arose and, imitating her manner, said, "I drink to the greatest of poets, my papa, and I also drink in the Greek fashion!" and straightway deluged himself and his small brother with the contents of his glass.

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